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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 001691

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SUBJECT: DRUG CHIEF SEETHES OVER PRESIDENTIAL MEETING

REF: ABUJA 02020

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reason 1.4 (B & D)

SUMMARY

1. (S) In an October 21 meeting with the Consul General, Dr. Bello Lafiaji, head of the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), appeared tired, shaken and agitated with regard to the recent meeting between President Obasanjo, Ambassador Campbell, and the British High Commissioner about Nigeria's counter narcotics effectiveness. The self-important Lafiaji sees our meeting with the President as a personal affront and a threat to his job, particularly given the coincidence of our meeting with an unflattering story about his agency in a local magazine. At this juncture, Lafiaji appears more focused on taking steps to safeguard his continued employment than in improving bilateral counter narcotics cooperation. End summary.

CHAIRMAN SHAKEN BY AMBASSADOR'S
MEETING WITH PRESIDENT OBASANJO

2. (S) Dr. Bello Lafiaji, Chairman of the NDLEA, was visibly shaken and agitated when he greeted the Consul General on October 21 at NDLEA headquarters in Lagos. This meeting came at Lafiaji's behest and followed President Obasanjo's meeting with the Ambassador and British High Commissioner (reftel). Lafiaji had some reason to look travel-worn and worried. President Obasanjo had abruptly summoned him to return home from Saudi Arabia to discuss the counter narcotics portfolio, but that meeting was cancelled because of the death of the President's wife and the Bellview Airlines plane crash over the weekend. Apparently, Lafiaji was briefed on the Ambassador's meeting with President Obasanjo by Presidential Chief of Staff Abdullahi Mohammed. The COS is a Lafiaji ally.

3. (S) Lafiaji described this as "the lowest point in my career," and said his reputation and that of the NDLEA had been damaged because the Ambassador and High Commissioner raised concerns with the President over Nigeria's counter narcotics performance. Lafiaji feared his removal and the dissolution of the NDLEA as a possible outcome of the President's scrutiny. As the meeting progressed he regained his composure somewhat, stating that if he was to be given the boot, he could leave with a clear conscience, having given his best effort.

A CLEAR WAY FORWARD - BUT A ROAD NOT TAKEN

4. (S) Consul General responded that the lack of progress in counter narcotics was a major concern in Washington. More specifically, Nigeria needed to target "leaders of drug organizations" and to do more to arrest major illicit shipments within Nigeria. The Consul General told Lafiaji that, instead of harboring feelings of resentment, he would do better for himself and his agency if he focused on a way forward through enhanced cooperation with our DEA shop. Consul General asserted the best course of action was for the NDLEA and DEA to devise a detailed action plan including specific tasks, timelines, and responsibilities, and to revitalize the Joint Task Force, giving it the express mandate to track down leaders of drug organizations. Lafiaji responded that coordination had been "excellent" so he was mystified by the sudden problem. The CG responded that cooperation could not have been optimal if the NDLEA and DEA could not agree on the definition of major trafficker. For the NDLEA, a courier transporting a larger than average payload was a major trafficker. To DEA, the term had a more restrictive meaning - it was reserved for the architects and financiers of a drug network and not for couriers. In the

end, Lafiaji assented to his joining with the DEA to devise a detailed action plan, but continued to lament the damage in relations between the agencies, and questioned whether progress was now possible.

RETALIATION?

15. (S) We have found out that the British Drug Liaison Officer (DLO) met Lafiaji prior to the CG but his session was acrimonious. In that meeting, the Chairman was similarly agitated and distressed over the British High Commissioner's action. But Lafiaji went further. According to DLO King, Lafiaji suggested he might end coordination with the British against narcotics trafficking and allow illegal drugs to proceed unhindered into the UK.

16. (S) At Chairman Lafiaji's direction, NDLEA International Affairs Coordinator Vincent Ossai met DEA Attache on October 25 to defend Lafiaji's record (septel). Since the meeting with the CG, there has been no communication from NDLEA requesting a meeting to begin the process of formulating the detailed action plan.

COMMENT

17. (S) Chairman Lafiaji has taken the recent meetings as a personal attack rather than official notice of concern over Nigeria's counter narcotics performance. He appears more concerned about maintaining his image than he is about the reality of lack of recent major victories in the drug war.
End comment.
BROWNE